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Derek Thomson
National Executive Committee

Report back regarding attempts to contact PCS members in the fight against ATOS.

I was delegated by Glasgow against ATOS towards the end of last year to try and contact some union reps within the PCS in order to try and arrange a meeting or series of meetings between Glasgow against ATOS. and PCS members.

The purpose of these meetings would be to examine if there was any common ground between our organisations in relation to the treatment of claimants generally and in the fight against ATOS in particular.

I contacted Derek Thomson Chairman of the PCS Scotland committee and PCS National Executive Council member in December 2012, and met with him soon after.

In a two hour meeting with him I put forward the point of view of the necessity for the unemployed and those in work - particularly Trade unionists, to unite in class solidarity.

I gave him copies of motions which had been passed at their recent conference. In these motions PCS members opposing universal credit made statements such as, "I believe that the key to this is working closely with claimant's groups and unemployed activists in our local areas and showing them that this is a direct attack on our class", and, "We must stand with disabled people and support their struggle".

I reminded him that many unemployed and disabled groups had joined PCS members on the picket lines during their recent strike action, and showed him a leaflet produced by a claimants group which was very supportive of DWP staff and their job situation.

Regarding ATOS, an article on the PCS website talks about, "The imposition of the Work Capability Assessment carried out by ATOS", and says, "PCS members are often in the front line facing the anguish and anger of those suffering from Government welfare policies. They did not create these policies; the union does not support them and is committed to campaigning against them". The article also states, "PCS is committed to strengthening its campaigning alliance with Disabled People against Cuts and the Black Triangle campaign".

On the website Manchester Coalition against the Cuts, Alex Davidson, Vice chair of PCS North says, "ATOS is a company whose sole motivation is sheer unadulterated greed", and a DWP member explained that, "Our members employed by ATOS and the DWP, are forced to operate in a framework designed by the Tories which puts cuts and profits ahead of disabled people's rights and needs", and that, "DWP staff were required to stop people receiving benefits".

The purpose of my talk with Derek Thomson was to get him to consult his colleagues with a view to them meeting with members of Glasgow against ATOS. He said he thought that this might be possible and mentioned some senior PCS members he had in mind. He thought that the earliest this could happen would be the end of January 2013.

~~Alan Brown~~
2 OPEN LETTER
To PCS members

Alan Brown

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alan@pcs.org.uk



Union Learning
in PCS Scotland



EUROPE & SCOTLAND

European Social Fund
Investing in your Future

Unfortunately, despite numerous 'phone calls and messages from me, I have yet to receive a reply.

Towards the end of January this year, I 'phoned another PCS member, Jas McGuinnes who is the PCS Glasgow branch secretary who works at Corunna House in Cadogan Street. He is employed by ATOS.

Initially he was reluctant to even have a telephone conversation with me when I told him I was contacting him on behalf of Glasgow against ATOS, but I persevered and asked if I could have a meeting with him. Again he was very reluctant about this saying that he felt there was no point in this. Eventually I managed to persuade him to agree to meet with me by saying I was happy to meet with him whenever and wherever it suited him.

He explained that he only had Thursdays for union duties and he was booked up for the foreseeable future. He then said he had some time later that day, and although I had other commitments I decided to cancel them in order to meet with him and told him I would be there at midday.

When I arrived at Corunna House it was strange to walk in without the doors being guarded. I was signed in at the reception desk and issued with a visitors tag. They 'phoned up from the front desk and Jas McGuinnes came down to get me.

Ironically, we had our talk in one of the assessment rooms. The talk lasted about two and a half hours. I never mentioned that I had met with Derek Thomson and that he hadn't as yet got back to me. But as before, I expressed the wish of Glasgow against ATOS to meet with him and some of his colleagues. After a long list of complaints and concerns he agreed to speak to other PCS/ATOS workers to try and arrange a meeting.

We exchanged email addresses and I gave him my home 'phone number. I also requested that even if his colleagues were absolutely against meeting us that he should call me so we would know exactly what the position was between us. I stressed this several times. He assured me that no matter what the outcome was he would be in touch to let me know. When I pressed him on when a meeting could take place he thought it could be in a fortnight's time, but might possibly take a bit longer than this to arrange.

To date I have not heard from him, but I intend to 'phone or email prior to our next picket.

COOPER JOHN <john.cooper343@ntlworld.com> 12 Feb (1 day ago)

to jas.mcguinness

Hi Jas,

I was wondering if you had managed to consult with your colleagues regarding the meeting I suggested at our recent talk.

I would be grateful if you could let me know how this is progressing, as I was hoping to be able to relay this information to the rest of our group at our forthcoming meeting this Wednesday.

I hope your members are amenable to the idea as I genuinely believe it is necessary to have these discussions in the hope of establishing solidarity between union members and the wider community.

Best wishes, John Cooper.

Mcguinness, Jas 11:22 (22 hours ago)

to me

John,
Alan Brown, PCS Industrial Officer, and myself will be available for a meeting with you on Thursday 14th at 2 o'clock, in the Unite building. PCS Scotland, 1st Floor 145 West Regent Street, Glasgow G2 2SG.
Jas

Report back from meeting with PCS Union Representatives.

On Thursday 14.1.2013 at 2.00.pm a meeting took place between members of Glasgow against ATOS and representatives of the Public and Commercial Services Union.

There were two members of the PCS present: Alan Brown, PCS Industrial Officer, and Jas McGuinness PCS Glasgow branch secretary and employee of ATOS.

Also present were seven members of Glasgow against ATOS; Marion, Maureen, Frank, Dominic, Jack, David and John.

Before the meeting with the PCS reps we met an hour earlier to decide what we wanted to achieve. Broadly speaking we decided on the following questions.

We asked the PCS reps what the PCS line was towards ATOS. They said that the PCS were against private companies being involved in the Welfare system, but that they had no say in the appointment of ATOS; this was a Government decision and any anger about the Work Capability Assessment should be directed at the Government and not at PCS members who are DWP or ATOS employees.

They maintained that the DWP and ATOS were simply acting according to Government directives; that they merely carried out practices such as the work capability assessments, sanctioning of claimants and sending claimants to workfare schemes according to these directives. They said that if PCS members refused to work to these directives they were essentially refusing to work and could conceivably be sacked.

They were at pains to point out that their members helped in the administration of the assessment process but did not participate in the actual procedure itself. In any case they only dealt with the assessment aspect, – the decisions about who had their benefits cut had nothing to do with them, and again we should direct our anger elsewhere.

We asked them if the various motions that had been passed at PCS conferences relating to the PCS's concerns and expressions of support for sick and disabled people were simply lip service or did they really mean it. We read extracts from PCS journals and from the PCS website in which they express willingness and stress the importance of uniting with disabled groups. They said the PCS were willing to give such support.

In view of this we asked the PCS to affiliate to Glasgow against ATOS and provide a financial contribution. Alan Brown said that this would have to be raised and passed at their conference before this could happen. We also asked PCS members to show solidarity by joining our picket outside Corunna House. Alan Brown readily agreed but felt it was unlikely that members of the PCS at Corunna house could participate by virtue of the fact that they were working.

We reminded them that low paid members of the PCS and other unions had as much to fear with the imposition of the cuts as the unemployed, and that it was in their interest to support the fight, and that it was necessary to establish class solidarity.

We asked them in the strongest terms to ask their members to consider the morality of their actions. We told them that it was our belief that a large percentage of society had been pushed to the point where they could not take any more, and that they as Trade Unionists should be on the side of these people.

We asked why PCS members could not refuse to administer the work capability assessment programme on moral grounds. We were told that this would be tantamount to manufacturing an industrial dispute and that this would put the PCS in jeopardy. Also if individual members refused to work, they could be under threat of losing their jobs. We pointed out that if any PCS member took this course of action surely they would have not only the PCS behind them but the Trade Union movement, and furthermore the absolute support of claimants groups. But they reiterated that they did not expect any of their members to put their jobs on the line. We suggested that some jobs are not worth doing.

We then suggested that if PCS members were so desperate to hang on to their jobs, why not at least work to ensure that people get their genuine entitlements, and to act in the claimants favour. We were told that all the areas of discretion that existed in the old system had been replaced with very strict procedures, and if these were not carried out rigorously by staff, they would find themselves facing disciplinary action by Management.

We pointed out that many of the staff at Jobcentres and Corunna House did not seem to need the threat of disciplinary action as they were often overzealous in applying severe penalties to claimants. We were told that again, this was the result of pressure from the Government which was then applied throughout the system.

We suggested a joint statement from the PCS and Glasgow against ATOS and a joint Press Conference against the cuts, and were told that this would depend on the wording of such a statement.

We requested that we be notified regarding any exhibitions or conferences hosted by ATOS so that we could be there to present our point of view.

We requested that we be asked to speak at forthcoming PCS events to deliver our point of view and appeal to their members. We were told to apply for this.

We asked for further meetings between us and the PCS, particularly engaging in a dialogue with ordinary members. Alan Brown said he would get back to us on this.

At times the discussion became a bit heated. The PCS members encountered some very strong demands from us. On the whole we were extremely critical of the PCS's unwillingness to consider the possibility of industrial action.

During the discussion, the PCS reps were told that many people felt that ATOS and DWP employees' behaviour was often akin to that of the Nazis. They are very sensitive to these comments and resent phrases such as "ATOS Kills".

We tried to explain that this was a widespread perception of how many of the public viewed their actions and that if they did not like these kinds of comparisons being made, particularly about being Nazis, then they had to stop behaving as they did.

During this exchange the PCS member and ATOS employee Jas McGuinness said that he had heard enough, and remarked something like "That was one "Nazi" too many", and stormed out of the meeting. Unfortunately our exchange had given him the excuse to get off the hook. Although we all agreed that he had a possible reluctance to cooperate with us even before the meeting, he had at least spoken to and arranged for Alan Brown to meet us.

The danger is that his attitude towards our group has now hardened and I would doubt if we can change it in the near future. This is unfortunate as he was a possible point of entry into Corunna House and the administration of the work there. On top of this, he is likely to give an unfavourable report back to his colleagues who will in turn harden their attitudes to us and possibly to claimants.

Despite this incident I felt the meeting was worth having. It allowed us to express our views strongly, yet on occasion with undoubted heartfelt emotion which I felt enhanced our arguments. It allowed us to warn the PCS reps that their Union needed to assess their relationship with their fellow members of the working class, - claimants and claimants groups. It enabled us to demand that they consider the necessity of challenging their masters, ATOS and the DWP.

A few personal points.

Although the object of our campaign is not to "butter-up" ATOS employees or become their best pals, our campaign can be advanced by building links and hopefully changing attitudes and behaviour in DWP and ATOS staff.

The surest way to the success of our campaign and for that matter getting rid of capitalism is the establishment of working class solidarity. Union members are a large part of the working class and whatever our differences we cannot ignore this fact.

This in no way implies compromise. We are out to get rid of ATOS and we demand the creation of a compassionate welfare system. And while the success of our campaign is not dependant on the involvement and support of the Trade Unions, it is an avenue we must explore before we reject it.

1
Personal points on the meeting with the PCS: Jack Ferguson

John's report largely gives a flavour of how the meeting went. What follows are my own personal opinions, and are only offered to try and help us move forward.

I approached the meeting thinking that PCS members had more to do with the administration of the tests than they say they do. PCS argue that their members are only in admin, booking people in when they come in etc. *

In order to target the people responsible, we need to know who they are. That means mapping who works in Corunna House and where the power lies, like the union would do with an organising campaign. This can only be done with friendly people on site who are willing to feed information.

If we could find people personally responsible for all this, then we could target them. As things stand, that doesn't look like it's PCS members.

PCS have a political position, that the government is responsible for welfare reform, and that targeting ATOS is the wrong target. They said their campaigning thrust is for all benefits work to be brought back into the public sector and for a proper alternative to welfare reform that would guarantee disability benefits. They will not target ATOS in the same way we have for this reason. This does not however mean they are an enemy for us.

Our aim is to support claimants practically, and to end the assessments. We have the picket and we are going to be developing our knowledge and skills for claimant support. Ultimately targeting ATOS only has a point if we are gaining information, disrupting the assessment process somehow, or putting financial and moral pressure for ATOS to withdraw from the contract.

But at the moment, aside from actively supporting people on the pickets, most of our actions are symbolic. If we want to actually pressurise over what takes place in Corunna House we need more information; if we want to get rid of the assessments that's a political issue that goes beyond the power of ATOS to control.

ATOS are doing the assessments and are therefore legitimate targets. But a properly planned campaign must find the right pressure points where our enemies are susceptible to pressure (the Co Op renewing their contract was a perfect example.) And we need to be strategic about examining where the power lies in this situation and targeting the right people. That means that just restricting ourselves to ATOS is limiting.

It's worth bearing in mind that PCS have actually been pretty active around welfare reform, lobbying the government, protesting, producing the pamphlet. In the meeting we attacked them for being "behind the class" and being unwilling to take industrial action. In fact PCS as a union is way more left wing than where public opinion of where the working class is at the moment*. Trade unions may be weak and neutered, but if there's one that has tried to go on strike and stand up it's been PCS.

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differently on that basis, including putting pressure on the people making unacceptable decisions. However, I would suggest the best campaigning avenue for doing that would be Unite Community Membership.. The question of "how much power over this does the person I'm dealing with" is an absolutely key one.

- 1/ WHO DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD BE TARGETING?
- 2/ WHAT EXACTLY DO PCS MEMBERS DO IN RELATION TO ATOS'S ADMINISTRATION ~~AT~~ COLUNNA HOUSE?
- 3/ WHO ARE THE BOOIES/UNIONS AT COLUNNA HOUSE WHO WORK FOR ATOS THAT WE SHOULD ~~THE~~ SEEK TO NEGOTIATE WITH?
- 4/ WOULD PCS MEMBERS WITHIN COLUNNA HOUSE BE PREPARED TO WORK WITH US TO REMOVE ATOS OR CHANGE THE WCA APPROX.?
- 5/ WHAT ABOUT THE BEHAVIOUR OF PCS MEMBERS WITHIN THE OWP IN RELATION TO SANCTIONS ~~ETC.~~?

Scottish House Conditions Survey

To see messages related to this one, [group messages by conversation](#).

16/12/2012

[Reply](#)

against

Hope of interest.

Scottish House Conditions Survey

What are the conditions people in and out of work are living in?

Scotland's Chief Statistician today published the Scottish House Condition Survey (SHCS): Key Findings 2011 Report as well as the SHCS Local Authority Report 2009-11. The key findings Report includes key statistics on the condition of Scottish homes, the number of households living in fuel poverty, the number of dwellings falling the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS), the energy efficiency of dwellings and other key descriptors of the occupied housing stock in Scotland. The report is available to view and download <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2012/12/4995/downloads>

Claimants - know your rights on sanctions

WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE BEEN SANCTIONED:

1) Challenge it! You have five days to explain why you have 'good cause'. You first write, or phone, the DWP office that made the decision, and say you want a reconsideration. There is a new rule that you have to do this before you can appeal. If you write, you need to give your name, national insurance number, address, the date the decision was made, and which benefit you were claiming. You can use phones at the jobcentre to make the request for reconsideration or to get more information about your sanction. Make sure you note the time and date of the call, if possible get the name of the person you spoke to and the office they work in. If the customer free phones have been removed then you can request an appointment that day to see a member of staff

If you can get enough information to prove the sanction was not in accord with the benefit rules, you might be able to get the decision changed at the reconsideration stage. If your Claimant Commitment or Jobseeker's Agreement has been fixed by your job centre adviser to be something you couldn't do, or difficult to sustain, you could get the decision changed because it is unreasonable.

If you were late or could not attend due to illness, domestic emergency or attending another job related activity then explain fully, as these can be treated as 'good cause'.

Appeals forms are no longer provided at jobcentres, they must be downloaded from
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/181311/SSCS1.pdf

2) Apply for a hardship payment – these payments are not advertised, request an application form at the Job Centre – you may fit into the criteria of being 'vulnerable', meaning that you should receive your hardship payment sooner. They look at other means of support you may have, whether you have a family or any health problems. If you know that the sanction will mean you will not be able to feed yourself or your family ask your job centre how you can be referred to a food bank.

3) Inform the revenues and benefits office – take proof of the sanction to your local housing office as soon as possible, tell them you have no other income. Housing Benefit and council tax reduction will be stopped following a sanction until you provide up to date information about your new weekly income to prevent any possible overpayments. If you do nothing you may end up with rent and council tax arrears, which may lead to legal action.

4) Continue signing on, even though you are not getting paid. If you don't, or if you don't comply with your Jobseeker's Agreement or Claimant Commitment, you could lose your benefit for a longer period and your Housing Benefit may also be affected.

5) Organise with other claimants to fight back! Don't face sanctions alone. If you work with other unemployed people you can get support and challenge the injustice of sanctioning.

Contact your local Unite Community group to take action against sanctions (see contacts at back).



Unite Community members' collection for local foodbank



KNOWING YOUR RIGHTS

Always read your Jobseekers Agreement/Claimant Commitment – this will specify exactly what steps you need to take each week, what hours you are available for and how far you are expected to travel. It essentially acts as a contract; you can disagree with it if you think the steps are unreasonable.

The JSA Regulations do not specify that claimants must keep written records of your job search. However, encouraging a claimant to keep a written record of the steps they have taken can help you to remember what you have done, and will help to build up a picture of the progress the claimant is making in their efforts to find work. (Labour Market Conditions Guide 200)

The steps that are reasonable will vary from claimant to claimant and from week to week. In looking at whether the steps taken are reasonable, all the following circumstances should be taken into account:

- Your skills, qualifications and abilities;
- Your physical or mental limitations, including any time spent training in the use of aids to improve your prospects of obtaining or retaining employment;
- The time which has passed since you last worked and your experience;
- The steps you have taken in previous weeks;
- The effectiveness of those steps in improving your prospects of securing employment;
- Whether or not the steps taken improve your prospects of obtaining employment;
- Whether or not the steps taken reduce your prospects of obtaining employment; availability and location of any vacancies; (Labour Market Conditions Guide 203)

The type and number of steps a claimant takes to find work may be affected by their ability or a health problem. For example, a disabled person may find it physically impossible to take the same steps as an able bodied person. However, they must still take whatever steps are reasonable allowing for their circumstances. (Labour Market Conditions Guide 204-205)

IF YOU ARE HOMELESS

If you have no living accommodation it may be difficult for you to be contacted by anyone offering employment or help in obtaining employment. You may also need to spend much of your time searching for accommodation. Your job centre adviser should take both these factors into account when considering what steps it is reasonable for you to take in a week. Your Jobseekers Agreement should indicate that you are taking steps to find accommodation. Your Jobseekers Agreement will need to be varied once accommodation is found. (Labour Market Conditions Guide 225-226).

Campaigning against cruel government welfare changes



YOU ARE ENTITLED TO TRAVEL COSTS

Remember you are entitled to help with travel costs for travelling to interviews outside of your normal signing time. The head of Jobcentres, Neil Couling, also recently stated that travel to job interview costs should also be paid. So make sure you ask your advisor how to claim these costs.

FIGHT SANCTIONS TOGETHER

The use of sanctions have massively increased in the last few years. The government have pushed more and more sanctioning in their belief that benefit claimants are scroungers that need to be punished into looking for work.

The Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), Unite, National Association of Welfare Rights Advisers, Unemployed Workers Centres believe that many claimants are unfairly sanctioned. The conditionality regime is designed to trip claimants up with increasingly unrealistic expectations of what counts as actively seeking work.

PCS, the union that represents jobcentre workers, opposes the punitive sanction regime and the Government's obsession with punishing benefit claimants. PCS directly opposed sanctions in the recent Select Committee report, which criticised DWP for "hitting the target but missing the point." PCS and Unite the union have been at the forefront of fighting changes in welfare attacks.

PCS members are put under extreme pressure to refer claimants for sanctioning; we are working to expose the Government lies on targets and working with other organisations to help claimants fight back.



Unite community members



NEW HARDER RULES FROM APRIL 2014

The DWP says that 'looking for work should be a full-time job'. The Claimant Commitment involves 'a strict compliance regime', under which claimants can be required to undertake up to 35 hours a week of job searching, or any other activity a Jobcentre 'job coach' thinks is appropriate. The Commitment will be even more oppressive than the existing set of sanctions that caused nearly 900,000 unemployed people to lose benefits – and the massive rise in food banks.

Other activities that a claimant may be expected to undertake will include 'work-focused interviews' whenever and wherever a jobcentre decides; 'work preparation' activities, which are designed to force those with sicknesses or disabilities into a 'health care' regime dictated by the jobcentre; and meeting a 'work availability requirement', where a claimant has to accept employment immediately, regardless of its suitability, or the level of pay and conditions. There is no extra provision for the bus fares, internet and phone costs, or other expenses incurred looking for a job 35 hours every week.

Changes from 28th April 2014 include daily or weekly signing and 30 hours a week Workfare placements. Whilst transport costs can be paid for attendance outside of the usual fortnightly signing, the new measures are clearly designed to catch claimants out and frustrate them off benefit.

If a claimant breaks any part of their Commitment, they will be subject to sanctions, which will mean a deduction, penalty or suspension of all their benefits. A claimant receiving three sanctions can see their benefit stopped entirely for up to three years.

Sanctions can be medium or high level; medium level can result from things like failing to apply for the agreed number of jobs each week (even if there are no new jobs available), failing to turn up to a job interview, or even just being 'sulky and uncommunicative' in an interview.

The trade union movement and voluntary organisations want to help claimants individually and collectively fight back against this system.

Together we are stronger.

UNITE COMMUNITY – THE UNION FOR THE UNEMPLOYED

Unite, the UK's biggest union now has a section for unemployed workers.

For 50p per week you can join and become part of your local community group and can get support, be trained in how to campaign and together fight back against this government's unfair attacks on the unemployed.

Join unite on-line www.unitetheunion.org/community or contact:



Joining Unite Community for 50p per week

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Jack Ferguson
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Joanne Galazka
M 07718668512
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Unite Community Centres Belfast

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T 02890452909

Unite Cinderford Community Centre

The Miners Hall
Wesley Rd
Cinderford, GL14 2JN

Cable Street

Unite Community Centre
Basement
St Georges Town
236 Cable Street
Shadwell, London E1 0BL
Cable.street@unitetheunion.org
T 0203 435 6182

Barnsley Centre

NUM/Unite Community Centre
2 Huddersfield Road
Barnsley, S70 2LS
<http://barnsleycsc.com/>

Unite Red Hill Community Centre

Miners Hall
Red Hill
Durham
Co Durham, DH1
4BD <http://durhamcsc.wordpress.com/>

The trade union movement and voluntary organisations want to help claimants individually and collectively fight back against this system.

Together we are stronger.



- Department for Work and Pensions group

Opposing sanctions

14 May 2014

Defending PCS members, supporting unemployed workers and disabled people.
The PCS DWP Group conference 2013 carried motion 146. The motion noted the ever increasing hostility of the Tory led government towards unemployed workers and the disabled. It highlighted their disgraceful attempt to demonise these groups in society identifying them as scroungers and their continual ramping up of the sanctions regime.
Conference welcomed

- the work done by the GEC to ensure that DWP management do not impose DMA referrals targets on members working in Jobcentres
- the advice issued by the GEC opposing the threat of PIPs if members do not refer enough customers for DMA action
- the guidance from the GEC about the health and safety risks posed to members as a result of operating a tougher sanctions regime.

Conference went on to instruct the incoming GEC to:

1. Continue to oppose sanctions targets and pressure on members to meet targets
 2. Work with claimant groups
 3. Use the media to expose the pressure imposed on our members and the social consequences of sanctioning claimants
 4. Use the PCS parliamentary group to campaign in Parliament to ensure that the pressure faced by PCS members in Jobcentres and the consequences of sanctions on claimants is exposed.
- This branch briefing gives a report to branches of the continuing work since conference last year by the GEC, regions and branches to oppose sanctions.

The GEC has continued to campaign in the past year using negotiations with the DWP, providing detailed guidance to branches and members, using the media, political lobbying, working with other unions and pressure groups and consulting PCS members in a survey.

Negotiations with the employer and the Couling investigation

The GEC has taken every opportunity to meet with Work Services management. At every meeting PCS has raised the issue of targets and the 'expectation' on many members to sanction customers.

We have provided evidence to the employer that targets exist and explained our opposition. Following a series of Guardian newspaper reports exposing a target regime in respect to sanction referrals, and in the face of evidence provided by PCS, the Work Services Director Neil Couling carried out an 'investigation'. The GEC PCS met with the Director and emphasised our concerns. The investigation "found no evidence of a secret national regime of targets or widespread secret imposition of local regimes to that effect." The findings ruled out a target culture and blamed 'rogue managers'. As the 'investigation' was limited to only the information provided by the media and PCS, the GEC does not accept that it was a thorough or meaningful examination into the target culture in Jobcentres.

The GEC therefore rejected the findings and has continued to campaign and defend PCS members the unemployed and disabled.

The GEC has also continued to challenge the use of Performance Improvement Plans (PIP) against members for not imposing enough sanctions. We believe that this demonstrates the existence of numerical targets. DWP is currently considering amending or removing the conditionality PIP as result of the persistence of our arguments.

Guidance to members and branches

Conditionality and sanctions is discussed by attendees from regions to every meeting of the quarterly Work Services Advisory Committee. Working closely with the WSD Advisory Committee the GEC have been six specific briefings on conditionality and sanctions in the last year. The GEC has also issued three workplace posters on sanctions.

The GEC has provided regular guidance to members including advising members that they can use discretion when deciding whether to make referrals to decision makers about sanctions and

conditionality. The GEC has also encouraged branches to hold members meetings and regional events.

The GEC advice has stressed to members that they are entitled to be accompanied by a PCS rep at meetings to discuss informal performance and PIPs. The GEC has also encouraged members to get union advice and representation where DMA referrals are highlighted as a performance issue.

Exposing sanctions in the media

The GEC has worked closely with the PCS national press officer to use the media to expose the use of sanctions and conditionality targets and expectations. This led to an internal investigation and the Independent Review of Sanctions.

PCS full time officer Charles Law was interviewed on Panorama on the rise in the use of foodbanks and the link to benefit sanctions.

Political lobbying

The GEC gave evidence to the Work and Pensions Select Committee in September 2013 following a written submission to the DWP Select Committee's examination into the role of Jobcentre Plus in the reformed welfare system. Our evidence was welcomed in the committee's findings for exposing the 'get them off benefit by any means' and target based culture of sanctioning in many Jobcentres. A further review of the conditionality regime has been recommended.

The GEC met with Matthew Oakley who was appointed by the DWP Secretary of State to undertake and Independent Review of Sanctions and we provided him with detailed evidence of our members concerns.

The GEC have also raised several parliamentary questions forcing government minister Ester McVey to state in parliament that there are no targets or expectations for sanction referrals.

The GEC worked with the NEC to submit a motion to the TUC Congress in 2013 on campaigning for a better social security system which set TUC policy opposing the sanctioning regime

Working with other unions and pressure groups

The GEC has worked closely with Unite community union branches and agreed a joint statement to be used in local campaigns against social security cuts. The GEC has recently worked with Unite Community union officers and agreed detailed joint guidance to claimants explaining their rights.

The guidance is now being produced by Unite for national distribution to other unions and unemployed centres.

PCS has met and agreed a statement with Disabled People Against the cuts and Black triangle to enable us to work closely on protests against sanctions and stricter benefit regulations.

The GEC has also met with a large number of unemployed workers centre representatives and DPAC and agreed joint campaigning work.

In local groups up and down the country PCS union reps and branches have actively campaigned for a better benefit system based on need.

Survey of PCS members in the DWP

The GEC have recently surveyed PCS members in the DWP who tell us that 61% have been pressured to refer claimants for sanctioning where they believe it may be inappropriate. 72.8% have seen an increase in verbal abuse, and 37.9% have seen an increase in physical abuse.

Unsurprisingly, 70% of members that responded do not believe that sanctioning positively impacts on claimants finding employment. 76.7% have also noticed an increase in food bank referral requests. The GEC are now demanding that Work services respond to these findings.

The role of PCS members

The GEC has noted with concern some attacks on PCS and our members because of their role in implementing the governments' welfare reform programme. PCS has been criticised by some for not fighting these attacks on welfare by instructing our members to refuse to implement them.

It is understandable that activists and campaign groups are angry and frustrated that the government's attacks on those least able to defend themselves cannot be easily stopped in this way.

National PCS legal advice is that non compliance by PCS members with sanctions, assessments or workfare would amount to illegal industrial action, the GEC is committed to working with the NEC in line with national conference policy to explore ways of including non cooperation with sanctions in a future legal trade dispute ballot.

The GEC strongly believe that a few thousand PCS members cannot refuse to implement these attacks on their own. We are concerned that a blanket instruction not to implement sanctions

COOPER JOHN <john.cooper343@ntlworld.com> 12 Feb (1 day ago)

to jas.mcguinness

Hi Jas,

I was wondering if you had managed to consult with your colleagues regarding the meeting I suggested at our recent talk.

I would be grateful if you could let me know how this is progressing, as I was hoping to be able to relay this information to the rest of our group at our forthcoming meeting this Wednesday.

I hope your members are amenable to the idea as I genuinely believe It is necessary to have these discussions in the hope of establishing solidarity between union members and the wider community.

Best wishes, John Cooper.

Mcguinness, Jas 11:22 (22 hours ago)

to me

John,
Alan Brown, PCS Industrial Officer, and myself will be available for a meeting with you on Thursday 14th at 2 o'clock, in the Unite building. PCS Scotland, 1st Floor 145 West Regent Street, Glasgow G2 2SG.
Jas

We reminded them that low paid members of the PCS and other unions had as much to fear with the imposition of the cuts as the unemployed, and that it was in their interest to support the fight, and that it was necessary to establish class solidarity.

We asked them in the strongest terms to ask their members to consider the morality of their actions. We told them that it was our belief that a large percentage of society had been pushed to the point where they could not take any more, and that they as Trade Unionists should be on the side of these people.

We asked why PCS members could not refuse to administer the work capability assessment programme on moral grounds. We were told that this would be tantamount to manufacturing an industrial dispute and that this would put the PCS in jeopardy. Also if individual members refused to work, they could be under threat of losing their jobs. We pointed out that if any PCS member took this course of action surely they would have not only the PCS behind them but the Trade Union movement, and furthermore the absolute support of claimants groups. But they reiterated that they did not expect any of their members to put their jobs on the line. We suggested that some jobs are not worth doing.

We then suggested that if PCS members were so desperate to hang on to their jobs, why not at least work to ensure that people get their genuine entitlements, and to act in the claimants favour. We were told that all the areas of discretion that existed in the old system had been replaced with very strict procedures, and if these were not carried out rigorously by staff, they would find themselves facing disciplinary action by Management.

We pointed out that many of the staff at Jobcentres and Corunna House did not seem to need the threat of disciplinary action as they were often overzealous in applying severe penalties to claimants. We were told that again, this was the result of pressure from the Government which was then applied throughout the system.

We suggested a joint statement from the PCS and Glasgow against ATOS and a joint Press Conference against the cuts, and were told that this would depend on the wording of such a statement.

We requested that we be notified regarding any exhibitions or conferences hosted by ATOS so that we could be there to present our point of view.

We requested that we be asked to speak at forthcoming PCS events to deliver our point of view and appeal to their members. We were told to apply for this.

We asked for further meetings between us and the PCS, particularly engaging in a dialogue with ordinary members. Alan Brown said he would get back to us on this.

At times the discussion became a bit heated. The PCS members encountered some very strong demands from us. On the whole we were extremely critical of the PCS's unwillingness to consider the possibility of industrial action.

During the discussion, the PCS reps were told that many people felt that ATOS and DWP employees' behaviour was often akin to that of the Nazis. They are very sensitive to these comments and resent phrases such as "ATOS Kills".

We tried to explain that this was a widespread perception of how many of the public viewed their actions and that if they did not like these kinds of comparisons being made, particularly about being Nazis, then they had to stop behaving as they did.

During this exchange the PCS member and ATOS employee Jas McGuinness said that he had heard enough, and remarked something like "That was one "Nazi" too many", and stormed out of the meeting. Unfortunately our exchange had given him the excuse to get off the hook. Although we all agreed that he had a possible reluctance to cooperate with us even before the meeting, he had at least spoken to and arranged for Alan Brown to meet us.

The danger is that his attitude towards our group has now hardened and I would doubt if we can change it in the near future. This is unfortunate as he was a possible point of entry into Corunna House and the administration of the work there. On top of this, he is likely to give an unfavourable report back to his colleagues who will in turn harden their attitudes to us and possibly to claimants.

Despite this incident I felt the meeting was worth having. It allowed us to express our views strongly, yet on occasion with undoubted heartfelt emotion which I felt enhanced our arguments. It allowed us to warn the PCS reps that their Union needed to assess their relationship with their fellow members of the working class, - claimants and claimants groups. It enabled us to demand that they consider the necessity of challenging their masters, ATOS and the DWP.

A few personal points.

Although the object of our campaign is not to "butter-up" ATOS employees or become their best pals, our campaign can be advanced by building links and hopefully changing attitudes and behaviour in DWP and ATOS staff.

The surest way to the success of our campaign and for that matter getting rid of capitalism is the establishment of working class solidarity. Union members are a large part of the working class and whatever our differences we cannot ignore this fact.

This in no way implies compromise. We are out to get rid of ATOS and we demand the creation of a compassionate welfare system. And while the success of our campaign is not dependant on the involvement and support of the Trade Unions, it is an avenue we must explore before we reject it.

19 May 2014

Attempts by the government to make the poorest and most vulnerable pay for a crisis not of their making were condemned at PCS DWP group conference.

The group's first motion this morning (19 May), proposed by Mandy Priest of DWP Dorset branch and seconded by Glasgow benefit centre branch, opposed the "implementation of a system based on punishment".

The motion also said the "widest possible campaign across the trade union movement" was needed to defeat the government's attacks on benefit claimants.

National crisis

Gerry McMahon from Glasgow benefit centre branch said: "The welfare state has been under attack in Britain for many years. Huge cuts have been made that make life on benefits much harder." Gerry highlighted the fact that a group of religious leaders have said that hunger is now a national crisis and said our union needs to take up its welfare campaign "like never before".

Nick Parker, from our Lincolnshire and Rutland branch, called for a united campaign involving "as many people as possible to defeat attacks on welfare".

Tony Church, speaking on behalf of the group executive, said: "In the 90s John Major, the Tory prime minister, said we were living in a classless society. It was a lie then it's a lie now. The current coalition government is probably the most divided ever." He said that welfare reform was just another name for screw the poor.

Concerted campaign

The motion instructed conference to campaign for:

- Fair, decent levels of benefit
- The repeal of the Bedroom Tax and benefit cap
 - A mass council house building scheme
- The abolition of the work capability assessment
- The abolition of workfare and removal of the sanctions regime
- A publicly-run, fair and decent social security system as part of a welfare state based on people's needs.

The motion was passed unanimously.

Department for Work and Pensions group

PCS rejects the DWP 2015 pay offer

24 June 2015

Following the conclusion of 2015 pay negotiations, DWP have now published their pay offer for 2015.

Main Points of the offer:

- A 1% consolidated increase to all staff
 - No pay progression
- A 2.5% increase in the AA Minimum
 - No non-consolidated payments to staff with a 'Must Improve' box marking
- No consolidated increase to staff who have had formal poor performance action commenced on RM at any time during the 2014/15 year and have received a 'Must Improve' box marking.

For the fourth year running DWP's pay offer is again restricted by the decision of the Tory government to limit consolidated pay increases in the civil service to no more than 1%. PCS rejects this 1% cap on our members pay. We are committed to opposing it and arguing instead for our pay claim of a £1,200, or 5%, pay increase for our members, along with a return to pay progression.

End pay restraint now

Another year of a miserly 1% pay rise cannot be tolerated. A 1% increase in the total DWP pay bill means there was just an additional £24.7 million available for consolidated increases this year. This sum, when divided between the 90,000 staff in DWP means there is nowhere near enough money available to meet the concerns of PCS members on pay.

A 1% pay increase means:

- There is no money to pay for pay progression. Members will again remain stranded on the pay scales with no idea of when, or even if, they may ever reach the max for their grade.
- Another pay award that fails to keep pace with the rising cost of living. Day to day living costs continue to increase and a 1% award is hopelessly inadequate in enabling members' income keep pace with rising prices.
- 40% of DWP staff have to rely on tax credits to supplement their low wages. A 1% increase does nothing to address the scandal of low pay in DWP.
- DWP pay remains lower than most other government departments, let alone comparable outside organisations, and a 1% increase allows for no element of catch up.
- Again DWP members are again being made to suffer under the government's austerity programme. Why should DWP staff continue to have to pay the price for the economic crash?
- Members constantly receive messages of thanks from Ministers and senior managers for the high performance of DWP. But these are just empty words unless backed up with a real monetary reward.
- This is the eighth year of pay restraint in DWP and the fourth year of a 1% cap.

Unsatisfactory performers

Members who have had formal poor performance action recorded on RM at any time during the 2014/15 performance year, and who have received a 'Must Improve' box marking, will not be eligible for a consolidated pay rise.

AA Minimum

PCS persuaded DWP to increase the AA Minimum by 2.5%. This ensures that everyone in DWP is paid more than the national Living Wage of £7.85 per hour. This goes a little way to addressing the issue of low pay in DWP. As a result AA's on the Minimum will receive a consolidated increase of 2.5% and those just above the minimum will receive an increase of between 2.5% and 1%.

Non Consolidated payments

Please refer to circular DWP/MB/019/15 for a full breakdown of how the non-consolidated payments have been distributed.

'Must Improve' Box Markings

Again DWP have refused to pay a non-consolidated payment to staff with a 'Must Improve' marking. PCS is completely opposed to the refusal to pay the 'Must Improve' staff a non-consolidated payment. Again in this year's negotiations PCS made a strong case for all staff to receive a non-consolidated payment. However DWP refused to budge on this issue. With consolidated pay rises so restricted, and with pay progression being non-existent, the non-consolidated payment is an essential element of pay for all members. It is unjustifiable to deny this to staff with a 'Must Improve' marking.

Members have no confidence in the people performance appraisal scheme. Year after year the appraisal system has been shown to be discriminatory and to favour the higher grades. It is wrong for DWP to base any decisions on pay on a flawed appraisal system. PCS has argued instead for all of the non-consolidated money to be converted into consolidated pay increases that could have been used to fund, at least in part, a decent pay rise or pay progression. However DWP are forbidden from doing this by Treasury-imposed rules.

'Achieved' Box Markings

In previous years DWP has indicated that their preference would be to stop making non-consolidated payments to members with an 'Achieved' marking and concentrate all the non-consolidated money on the top box marking in line with a number of other government departments. Last year PCS was able to successfully prevent this from happening in DWP and we are pleased to say that once again our members with an 'Achieved' box marking will receive a non-consolidated payment this year.

There is no doubt that DWP is under pressure to do the same as other departments. It is only as a result of PCS' pressure, backed up by our members, that we have been able to prevent this.

PCS Response – We all need a pay rise

The DWP GEC has met and rejected this pay offer in line with PCS policy. This is a derisory pay offer and goes nowhere near meeting the concerns of members.

Members Meetings

The GEC will not run a formal ballot on this pay offer given that a pay offer artificially restricted by the Treasury-imposed 1% cap cannot be acceptable. However PCS will be holding members meeting in offices to discuss the pay award. Time and premises have been allowed for this and we encourage all members to attend their meeting and to have your say on the pay offer. Ask your local rep or branch secretary for details of your pay meeting.
DWP intend to pay the award in July 2015 salaries.

PCS members on Universal Credit vote yes for strike action

6 July 2015

PCS members vote yes for strike action.

PCS members at the Glasgow and Bolton Universal Credit (UC) sites have voted for discontinuous strike action, beginning with a two day strike.

84.4% voted YES for strike action

89.7% voted YES for action short of strike action.

The turnout was 55.8%

This overwhelming ballot result sends the clearest possible message to DWP management. Their current proposals on Ways of Working, and the other working arrangements in UC, are not acceptable and must be changed.

PCS will be meeting UC management on Thursday 9th July and will be demanding a fundamental rethink of management's proposals.

Management must now listen to the voice of PCS members on Universal Credit. They could not have given management a clearer message.

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Atos Origin Healthcare

Of the eight recognised unions representing employees within ATOS, PCS is the only one which has full bargaining rights. This means that we are the only union which can properly negotiate terms and conditions on behalf of our members employed by the company.

Nationally, we have the strength of 283,000 members who work in both the public and private sectors.

PCS within ATOS is made up of people like you. We work together to campaign for job security, better and more equal pay for all, better quality jobs, training and development, rights at work, health and safety and information representation.

Many of your colleagues in ATOS are PCS members and that number is growing steadily.

Our union is your voice in the workplace. The total number of PCS members was boosted in 2012 when over 1,000 members from Siemens IT were transferred into Atos. This made us by far the largest union within Atos. PCS members set the agenda for ensuring better pay and conditions by:

- Running professional campaigns on issues important to members
- Providing up to date information on developments affecting our members both nationally and internationally
- Ensuring lifelong learning and skills development opportunities are created through union learning
- Effective representation, support and advice when needed

The full-time officer is Jim Knotts - jimk@pcs.org.uk based at PCS HQ 020 7801 2667.

Jim's role is to provide advice, assistance and support to PCS representatives at Atos Healthcare.

By being involved in our union we have the opportunity together to resolve issues through discussion and negotiation.

By doing this as a group we are more effective than as individuals.



Glasgow Against ATOS (Posted on GAA Facebook site.)

On 13.11.2013; Glasgow Against Atos (GAA) attended a meeting at the Unite the union offices in Glasgow. Also attending was Allan Brown from the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union. PCS is the sixth largest union in the UK. PCS is also the union representing those employed by Atos Healthcare and Jobcentre

Plus. Unite and PCS have been forging their alliance for some time now. Socialists would argue, that all workers are 'working class', and thus according to PCS, are workers like any other worker.

GAA are unsure, why this meeting was taking place in the first instance – and for whose benefit? Listening to Allan Brown, trying to defend Atos, whom he admitted was a “toxic brand”, while also berating Atos’s own Thierry Breton for landing a £280,000 bonus (total pay 1.9 million.) was Mystifying! We were also expected to shed a tear for Atos staff, who are demanding a 2.8% pay increase, and why not, Atos made a financial killing last year (while destroying the disabled?) Our hearts truly bleed for Atos staff; who also wish better working conditions, while complaining about the emotional stress caused by the job. Never mind the emotional stress of being sanctioned, or having your disability benefit entitlements stripped from you. Allan Brown was aware of the media “horror stories” or as GAA see it – the daily reality of being disabled or unemployed. And GAA also strongly rebuked the pseudo line of reason (that we keep hearing from ‘all’ the political parties, and now PCS), that Atos is not to blame, it’s the Capitalist system, the government, DWP, the coalition,

austerity, Ian Duncan Smith – anyone but Atos! GAA even asked Allan Brown; how bad can things be inside Atos, when even Atos staff dislike their own practices?

But the meeting got better – a lot better! It seems that PCS – they tried this in Feb of this year actually want to support GAA in our campaign against Atos! Confused – you will be, but not GAA; we know exactly what side we're on, and it's not with the PCS union.

GAA asked – will you stand with us at pickets? No was the response. Will you take union action against Atos – the answer was no! It seems the management whip arm is always raised at Atos – and staff are too intimidated to speak up for the disabled people on the receiving end of DWP assessments. PCS's only concession was their cancelling of appointments and an 'unofficial go slow campaign'; which GAA knows does not make the situation any better, but worse for the claimant!

But wait, we're told; not all Atos employers carry out assessments, some are simply civil servants, administrators just doing a job. Here in the real world, where we see the results of Atos daily – GAA has to say; we don't care what a person's job is!

It seems PCS only have their own interests at heart and GAA will not be co-opted by any organisation!

We all know – Atos (its employees') are really just paid assassins for the government, and a political poisoned chalice - that nobody wishes to touch! Little wonder no-one will take accountability least Atos for their actions.

(C) Glasgow Against Atos 2013.

To the Militant strikers of the PCS.

*Good Luck with your strike regarding pension, pay and conditions.
....But do you think you could stop fucking the sick, disabled and the
unemployed about?*

Well it's good to see that the PCS union members have the bottle to take strike action, - not unfortunately because they are no longer prepared to do the Government's dirty work by implementing sanctions which means that claimants have no benefit to live on, not to prevent the needless deaths caused by Government contract killers ATOS, - but to protect their own interests.

Many PCS members seem to have managed without any problem to go along with Ian Duncan Smith's vicious campaign of annihilation on the sick, disabled and unemployed. There was nothing they could do about it you see - orders are orders and if they didn't cut people's benefits their Managers could have them up on a disciplinary, - but what about the people on the receiving end of these actions?

Have they no idea what they are doing to people when they implement these sanctions?

Have they forgotten they are dealing with human beings?

Can they not see they are playing the Bosses game, and in doing so ruining the lives of working class people – their class!

When they implement these sanctions they are throwing people into abject poverty; how are these claimants supposed to get by? How are they supposed to survive?

Let's look at it another way: What if it was **your** son or daughter on the receiving end of sanctions? What if it was **you**? Do you think you might be a bit more caring then?

It's no good trying to blame the Government- "The bad Tories made me do it", or "The Management made me do it", it's no use trying to avoid responsibility for your actions – we all have a responsibility;- we have a responsibility for our

actions and a responsibility to our class. Your actions are the final link in the chain of despair for many working class people. Have you read about the suicides? Have you read about the hardship and misery your actions are causing?

How to stop the misery?

Discuss with your workmates and fellow Trade unionists a collective strategy of **refusal to implement sanctions**. If you can go on strike for pay, pensions and conditions, you can surely organise a strike to protect any PCS workers threatened by disciplinary action.

Isn't it better to stand up to the bosses than participate in actions that may cause people harm or even to take their own life?

The Government are waging war on working class people and wittingly or otherwise you are helping them. It's time the PCS reassessed their situation, it's time they extended the solidarity expressed in their strike for pay and conditions to the rest of their class.

During the Miner's strike in the 1980's Arthur Scargill made the point that despite being a despicable human being, Margaret Thatcher was at least standing up for her class - unlike the Labour Party who betrayed *their* working class members.

In 1931 a young girl Florence Reece - the daughter of a mineworker, wrote a song in support of striking miners in Harlan County, Kentucky. She went on to become a social activist and songwriter, and spent the rest of her life campaigning on social and Union issues.

The extraordinarily powerful song she wrote at 12 years of age asks the question, "Which side are you on?"

Well, which side are *you* on?

When P.C.S. workers take action to stand by the sick, disabled and the unemployed, - we will stand by them!

"I can hire one-half of the working class to kill the other half." Jay Gould, Financier and railroad developer.

Trade Unionists – Defend your working class brothers and sisters!

As the Government's vicious attack on the working class increases, people are organising in a desperate struggle to survive.

Anti Bedroom Tax groups have sprung up in many communities to defend those affected by this shocking and completely unnecessary tax on the poor.

Disability campaigners are highlighting, and trying to combat the outrageous treatment of claimants by Atos at their notorious "assessment centres".

While the Government relentlessly wages war on the working class, the so-called representatives of working people - the Labour Party - stands idly by as many of the people who elected them are forced into extreme despair and hardship.

There is no official Labour Party campaign against the Bedroom Tax. There is no official Labour Party condemnation of Atos.

Many of us through bitter experience have no faith in the Labour Party to represent, let alone defend, working class people.

There is however, one institution that we do expect to defend working class interests and that is the Trade Unions.

While trade unions are there to represent and promote the interests of their members, surely it should go without saying that this must not be at the expense of their working class brothers and sisters!

Yet unfortunately that is what is happening. Trade unions and their members are participating in the Government's war on the poor, the sick, the disabled and the unemployed.

Despite some trade unions' public condemnation of Tory plans, they are in effect aiding and abetting the Tories and Lib Dems in the implementation of their vile and reprehensible policies - and in the process destroying many people's lives.

Unite and Unison members staff many Housing Associations. At some point they may be required to implement eviction proceedings against tenants who have been unable to pay the Bedroom Tax. To date, the Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations - while claiming to campaign for the abolition of the Bedroom Tax - have yet to take a stand and say that they will refuse to implement evictions as a result of inability to pay.

Labour councils are in the process of issuing eviction notices to tenants who cannot pay the Tory Bedroom Tax!

Most of the staff in Job Centres and at Atos assessment centres are members of the Public and Commercial Services union, (P.C.S.). Recently their one day strikes for better pay, conditions and pensions for their members were supported by unemployed and disabled groups and individuals.

The P.C.S. workers at Job Centres are supposed to help you find work, but they also impose sanctions on claimants which mean that those clients are deprived of benefit for one month to six months or up to three years.

The P.C.S. workers were not demanding an end to sanctioning of claimants when they decided to strike.

P.C.S. members also help to implement the widely criticised so called assessments at Atos centres which claimants are obliged to attend to be assessed for eligibility. These quack assessments have found chronically, and even terminally ill people "fit for work".

Atos recently declared a woman "fit for work" as she lay dying in hospital with her husband at her bedside!

P.C.S. members working at Atos are participating in an inadequate and flawed "assessment" process that has been condemned by numerous groups, experts, M.P's and the British Medical association and has been demonstrated to be a complete farce.

Or at least it would be a farce if the whole diabolical, disastrous process was not complicit in the deaths of hundreds of people.

So where do we go from here?

Trade unions have to re-assess their position; Instead of participating in the destruction of their fellow working class brothers and sisters, they have to turn their sights on the real enemy, the capitalist system. They have to take on big business and the politicians that are the driving force behind the attempts to destroy an organised working class. If the capitalists had their way we would all be working round the clock just to stay alive! At the moment some people are being forced to work for their legally entitled benefits, and others can barely survive because they have sanctioned by Jobcentre staff or have lost their benefits thanks to Atos assessments.

Trade unionists, Jobcentre staff and Atos employees can also find themselves on the receiving end of this if their circumstances change. Does it have to get to this point before they see the light?

What can we do about it?

P.C.S. members at Jobcentres and their shop stewards need to discuss how they can *collectively* organise for the non implementation of sanctions. The P.C.S. Union at a local and a national level have to encourage and support this. If these actions were taken they would of course be welcomed, supported and defended by Claimants rights groups and individuals.

Likewise P.C.S. members at Atos have to *collectively* speak out about the absolute inadequacy of the Atos assessment system and *collectively* refuse to participate.

If the P.C.S. can organise and strike for better pay, conditions and pensions, surely they can organise to stop the scandal of sanctions and Atos?

Otherwise, and make no mistake about it, you are collaborating in the disempowerment of your class. Unless Trade unions and their members start to organise to defend and not attack, their working class brothers and sisters they will have absolutely no credibility amongst the victims of these political policies.

Trade unions were formed to protect the poorest in society and they were formed by people who were prepared to challenge and if necessary break the law. Trade Unions need to recognise that they have not just their member's interests to consider, but they have a wider social responsibility to their working class brothers and sisters.

Are we our brothers and sisters keepers? Yes we are!

Incidentally the quote by Jay Gould "I can hire one-half of the working class to kill the other half" was said in 1886.

Nearly one hundred and thirty years later it would appear to still hold true – unless of course the Unions can rediscover the true meaning of unity and solidarity.

As Donald L. Foley of the American Postal Workers Union more recently put it:

"It is always somewhat perplexing and sometimes shocking to hear, from respected unionists, a lack of concern for the struggle of brothers and sisters outside their own backyards. Such failure to bear faith and allegiance to real solidarity is what lies at the heart of labor's inability to coalesce into the force that some of our greatest leaders have envisioned. We must come to the realization that we are all co-workers, brothers and sisters in the struggle with owners".

Workers of the World, Unite!

There will be plenty of time for round table discussions on welfare work, campaigning, and wider strategy, and we have two guest speakers:

David Webster (University of Glasgow) who gave powerful evidence against sanctions to the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee Enquiry

(You can hear David Webster

here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04yk7h6>, and read his evidence here: <http://www.cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/CPAG-HofC-Wk-Pens-Sanctions-DW-evidence-Dec-2014.pdf>)

Denis Curran, chair of Loaves and Fishes foodbank and formidable anti-austerity campaigner

(you can see Denis speaking to members of the Scottish Parliament here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ChwRisjbS8>)

ALL WELCOME

(please share with anyone else who may be interested)

Terry Stoate

16 Feb (2 days ago)

to
me

Thank you for your help, any of which is graciously accepted. I will read it all, but I will only use a small percentage of any research you send me, as there are many sites dedicated to DWP atrocities and by keeping it personal and humorous, I'm hoping more people will engage with my work. So it's important not to turn it into the rant it deserves to be, but to include good research at appropriate junctures. I spent a long time editing out the bitter and twistedness of my first draft, whilst adding humour to make it more accessible. Due to media-supported state demonisation, the gripes of the new underclass will be hard enough to sell anyway as there is little public sympathy for us, not to mention the disproportionate amount of hostility. I agree with you that the unions aren't doing enough to help, but then nobody is. "Welfare issues" can, to a certain extent, be compared to "women's problems," everyone knows they exist, but no-one wants to talk about them. I'm happy that Unite are at least trying and consequently giving a much-needed voice to the voiceless. I should very much like your information about the Claimant's Union, as although I'd condense it to a paragraph, it would be interesting to compare and contrast. Thank you once again

Best Wishes



UnitetheUnion Community Branch

13:17 (8 hours ago)

to

me

Hi John, it was good to see you again on Wednesday. The meeting went quite well. I am writing to ask you about your friend who attended the branch on Wednesday. To my knowledge, I dont think he is a member of Unite Community but has attended the branch on several occasions. If that is correct, do you think you could persuade him to join? He would be very welcome and I am sure he would make a good contribution.

Unfortunately, only paid up members of Unite Community can attend the branch (as per SO enclosed) therefore if he is not a member this means he could not attend the branch in the future. I apologise in advance if he has recently joined.

Regards, Linda

Faternally,

Linda Clarke
Secretary
Greater Glasgow Unite the Union Community Branch

[SUWN] our union branch motion re ATOS

Inbox|x

Vicky Grandon umoja.inc@hotmail.com 27 Oct (1 day ago)

to suwn

For SUWN information - This motion was passed at UNITE Community Youth Work Not for Project Glasgow/Renfrew Branch in October, and sent to Glasgow Trades Council for submission to STUC :

"Congress notes:

- Sponsors of the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow include ATOS.
- ATOS has been the object of sustained campaigning by disability rights activists, for reason of its conduct of Work Capability Assessments on behalf of the Con-Dem coalition, with the goal of driving people with disabilities off benefits.

Congress believes ATOS should not be allowed to exploit the Commonwealth Games as a source of publicity.

Congress therefore resolves to:

- Instruct the General Council to write to the Board and Executive Team of Glasgow 2014 calling on them to cancel ATOS' sponsorship of the Games.
- Instruct the General Council to write to Glasgow City Labour Group urging them to support the demand that ATOS should not be accepted as a sponsor of the Games.
- Support campaigning by disability rights groups against ATOS sponsorship of the Games".

Cheers, Vicky

**UMOJA INC, umoja.inc@hotmail.com
c/o 36 Glasgow Street, 2/L
Hillhead, Glasgow, G12 8JR
07449342438, 0141-339-6850**

(Letter sent to Morning Star Editor in reply to article: Independent report savages Tory work fitness assessments, Friday, December, 2113.)

Dear Editor;

In regard to your article Independent report savages Tory work assessments (13.12.13.)

Mark Serwotka General Secretary of the Public and Commercial services (PCS) union stated 'no one-joined the employment service to administer a system designed to harass people and take away their benefits.' Ryan Fletcher, who wrote the article adds; 'Civil servants' union PCS also oppose them [work capability assessments] (WCA), claiming they do not support people back into employment. Mark Serwotka is also quoted; there is 'mounting anecdotal evidence to show that people are being found "fit for work" and so denied employment support allowance (ESA).

I have to ask, and am curious as to why the PCS union were quoted in this article. PCS is the union which supports Atos employees (Atos being the company used to carry out the very assessments your article refers to.) In fact; PCS have a dedicated Atos homepage, and are one of eight unions supporting Atos employees - the very same Atos employees (or are they just as Allan Brown of PCS says 'civil servants' doing a job), who have 'denied people ESA and JSA, and sanctioned their benefits!

At a meeting at the Unite union in Glasgow (13.11.13), Glasgow Against Atos (GAA), asked Allan Brown, who himself described Atos as, 'A toxic brand', will you stand with us at pickets? No was the response. Will you take union action against Atos – the answer was no! What was mentioned was PCS's support for its members seeking a 2% pay rise, justifying this while also berating Atos's own Thierry Breton for landing a £280,000 bonus, (taking his total pay 1.9 million.) Even a concession by Mr Brown; that PCS members were 'cancelling claimants' appointments, and working unofficially on a go slow' didn't score them any points (as this only impacts negatively on the claimant.) And there was little sympathy for PCS/Atos employees affected by the stress and poor working conditions of the job. What about those so officiously stripped of their disability benefit entitlement, or sanctioned for weeks on end? Mr Brown was aware of these media 'horror stories', or as GAA see it; the daily reality of being disabled or unemployed.

There seems to be a very mixed message coming from PCS (and other unions.) On one hand they condemn these ferocious government welfare cuts, which is resulting in untold emotional and financial misery for those [disabled] people affected. Yet they also support the very people carrying out these cuts!

And GAA also strongly rebukes the pseudo line of reason (that we keep hearing from all the political parties, (and now PCS), that Atos is not to blame, it's the Capitalist system, the government, DWP, the coalition, austerity, Ian Duncan Smith – anyone but Atos!

We all know – Atos (who made a financial killing last year), its employees, are really just paid assassins for the government, and a political poisoned chalice - that nobody wishes to touch! Little wonder no-one will take accountability least Atos for their actions.

David Adam Glasgow Against Atos.



GREATER GLASGOW UNITE COMMUNITY BRANCH STANDING ORDERS

*To be read in conjunction with Rule 17 of the Unite Rulebook
Agreed at 8th October 2014 Branch Meeting*

1 Notice of Meeting and Quorum

The branch shall normally meet monthly on the second Wednesday of the month.
Eight branch members present shall form a quorum.
An AGM will be held in March of each year for which members will be given at least 7 days notice.

Only Unite Community paid up members are entitled to attend the branch and vote. Potential Community members may attend one branch meeting as a visitor with the agreement of the Chair – thereafter they must formally join the Branch before attending any further meetings. On occasion, Unite members from other branches may attend as visitors with the agreement of the Chair and the Branch Committee may invite external and internal speakers to branch meetings.

2 Officers of the Branch

Officers of the branch shall include a Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and Equalities Officer who shall be elected at every AGM of the branch.

In the absence of the elected Chairs, the Secretary should not chair the meeting.
A branch member should be elected as *ad hoc* Chair for the duration of the meeting.

Delegates to represent the branch at local Trade Union Councils, Unite Committees and Other bodies should be elected annually at the AGM.

If a vacancy for any branch officer or delegate arises between the AGMs then the branch may elect a member until the next AGM.

3 Agenda and Order of Business

The Branch Secretary shall be responsible for receiving all papers and drafting the Agenda in liaison with the Branch Committee. The Branch Committee will be responsible for organising the branch business between meetings.

Any member may introduce other business for the consideration of the meeting but must notify the secretary usually 5 days in advance.

4 Conduct of Business

The Chair shall be responsible for the conduct of the meeting.
The Chair shall have the same speaking rights as any other member.
The ruling of the Chair on any question relating to the conduct of the meeting shall be final unless a challenge to the Chair is supported by a majority of the members present.
In the event of an equality of votes, a proposition before the Branch shall not be carried.

What are *your* views and experiences of welfare support and sanctions?

WE WOULD LIKE TO INVITE YOU TO TAKE PART IN A MAJOR NATIONAL RESEARCH PROJECT

What is the research about?

Welfare support and benefits increasingly require people to meet particular conditions and behave in certain ways. This study aims to understand the effectiveness of these conditions, and the support and sanctions linked to them, for different groups of people accessing the welfare system. ***We want to hear from people who have direct experience of support and sanctions.***

To do this we are carrying out interviews with 480 people in nine cities in England and Scotland over the next few years. We are also conducting interviews and focus groups with support agencies.

Who is doing the research?

The research is funded by the Economic & Social Research Council, and is being conducted by independent researchers from six UK universities.

How do I take part?

You may be interviewed up to a total of 3 times, once each year, for the next 2 years. The interviews will take place in your own area at a time suitable for you by a trained University researcher. We will ask you about your experiences and views of welfare support and sanctions. We will record the interview with your permission.

Each interview will last about an hour. You do not have to talk about anything you don't want to discuss and you can withdraw from the research at any time. **Everything you say will be treated in confidence.** Your name will not be used in any published reports and **we will not pass your details on to anybody else.** We will also keep you informed about the research findings.

Will I get paid?

As a thank you for taking part you will receive a **£20 shopping voucher** for each interview. You will get this voucher on the day that you are interviewed.

Want more information?

If you want to ask any questions about the research or want to know more about taking part, then please contact **Alasdair Stewart on 0141 330 2277** alasdair.stewart@glasgow.ac.uk. General information on the research can be found at: <http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk/>

Scottish Unemployed Workers' Network.

ONE DEMO DOESN'T MAKE A MOVEMENT

Yesterday in George Square the SUWN were out in strength. Unemployed workers are facing the full force of the Tory attacks, but there were no unemployed speakers on the platform. There were almost no speakers from grassroots activist groups at all. You might say that speaking at a demo is not such a big deal, and you'd be right; but if this is an indication of how the fight-back against austerity is being organised, then that is worrying. A demo is not just a performance. It should be part of a process, and for that it needs the widest possible involvement of different groups, not just on the day but in the organisation. That way, when we all go home, we don't just have a few photos on Facebook, we have the beginnings of a movement. In 2010 the TUC organised a demonstration of half a million in London, and then did nothing. In 2011 we marched again in support of striking public-sector workers, and again the trade union leadership backed off. Fine words are worse than useless if they are not followed by action. And speeches about solidarity ring especially hollow. With one of our activists arrested when helping a vulnerable claimant at Arbroath Jobcentre and about to be up in court, we had hoped to see solidarity put into action. We were disappointed, and we believe that rank and file trade unionists will be as well. We are publishing below our request to Dave Moxham, Deputy General Secretary of the STUC, to be involved in the organisation of yesterday's demonstration, and his dismissive response. We didn't put it out earlier because we didn't want to do anything that might impact on the demo itself, but now we need to talk about how to build a real movement for change.

SUWN TO DAVE MOXHAM, 21 MAY 2015:

Dear Dave

I am writing to ask if the Scottish Unemployed Workers Network can play a role in organising for the anti-austerity demo and have a speaker at the rally. Unemployed people are bearing the brunt of the austerity cuts and are set to face even greater hardship when the £12 billion welfare cuts get implemented. Our network, which is largely made up of people who are - or recently have been - unemployed, is the most active organisation fighting for the rights of unemployed workers in Scotland. We have been growing rapidly and now have regular advice stalls outside jobcentres in Govan, Paisley, Dundee and Arbroath – and more are planned. These are allowing us to reach a layer of people who never make it to the office-based welfare organisations. We are also active in campaigning against workfare and sanctions and in alerting the wider public to what is happening. The report that we produced on sanctions last year looked at the experience of 90 different claimants and was sent as evidence to the House of Commons select committee enquiry as well as to all MSPs and Scottish MPs. You can find out more about what we have been doing on our increasingly busy facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/scottishunemployedworkersnetwork>.

We are very glad to see the STUC firmly behind this protest and hope it can be an opportunity to build stronger ties between trade unions and community and activist groups, and between employed and unemployed workers.

Looking forward to hearing from you
Sarah

SUWN TO DAVE MOXHAM, 20TH JUNE:

Dear Dave

I am concerned that we have yet to receive a reply to this email and my earlier text.

With so much of the political class trying to drive a wedge between employed and unemployed it is more vital than ever that we come together in this fight against 'austerity'. The unemployed have no choice but to be on the front line of the struggle, and our activists (many of whom are themselves unemployed) have been doing all they can to be there with them. We are continuously up against a DWP machine that is determined to punish the unemployed and anyone who tries to help them. One of our activists will actually be up in court 3 days after the anti Austerity protest as a consequence of being arrested when trying to help a vulnerable benefit claimant negotiate more reasonable treatment from the jobcentre.

We hope and trust the the STUC will show us much needed solidarity and ensure we have full opportunity to put forward our cause.

best wishes

Sarah

DAVE MOXHAM TO SUWN, 17 JUNE

Hi Sarah,

Thanks for your note.

I am content in the medium term to have a discussion with you about SUWN and its campaigning positions. But I am not recommending that you be invited to speak on the platform. As you'll understand we have literally dozens of requests and all cannot be accommodated.

As you know I have been aware of SUWN since its inception and the STUC provided it early with some support.

I am to be honest unclear on how it has developed and, in particular its main role which I understood to be the provision of practical support to unemployed workers. Whilst I am sure that there are some unemployed workers connected to the network, the primary things that I have observed and which have been related to me are the protests undertaken at DWP offices but also, during the referendum, support for a 'Yes' position. As our platform for the rally amply shows, there is no problem whatsoever in 'Yes' supporting organisations having a very major role, I question whether that was an appropriate choice for an organisation which I thought aspired to representing, or at least networking, all unemployed workers.

I have not taken this view alone, and in speaking to a number of other people, it has been related to me, that your organisation has on more than one occasion taken a strongly anti-union position, including criticism for our affiliate PCS, which is a leading anti-austerity campaign organisation. I am certainly not averse to a good robust debate, but a platform which aims to unite trade unionists and other campaigning organisations against austerity and attacks on trade unions is, in my view, not the place to rehearse those arguments.

I recognise that this will be a disappointing answer and, no doubt, you will wish to comment on what I have written, but I thought it important to be candid as well as repeating my offer to meet in due course to discuss the work of SUWN.

Best wishes
Dave

SUWN TO DAVE MOXHAM, 17 JUNE

Dear Dave

I have just returned from a meeting of the Scottish Unemployed Workers' Network, where your letter was received with outrage.

If Saturday is to contribute to building a genuine anti-austerity movement, then those at the forefront of the struggle should be playing an integral part: that means those who are being reduced to destitution, and those who are fighting alongside them and being taken to court for their pains. We will only beat austerity through solidarity. The SUWN has shown solidarity to workers in struggle, such as the porters in Dundee, but now that we have asked for solidarity from the official representatives of the trade union movement, we have had the door slammed in our faces.

We have also been quite bizarrely slurred as anti-trade union, and reprimanded for daring to take a position (after group discussion) on the most significant political event to take place in Scotland in a generation, which would probably have had a greater impact on the unemployed than on any other collection of workers.

You confess to not really knowing what we have been doing. Perhaps I can invite you again to have a look at our facebook page and website where you will find accounts of our practical advocacy work, our research and writing, and our campaigning. You are in a position to help us. I cannot understand why you choose not to.

We will, of course, be coming to the demonstration, but we need an anti-austerity movement we can all be part of, not a club where some are destined to remain as observers outside the gates.

Regards
Sarah